

A
L E T T E R .

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM PITT, Esq;

FROM AN

OFFICER at FORT FRONTENAC.

L O N D O N :

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LETTER

RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM PITT, ESQ.

FROM

OFFICE



TO
JAMES O'NEILL, ESQ.
OF THE

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LETTER, &c.

Amongst the crowd of addresses which undoubtedly have been presented to you on so happy an occasion as the late success of his majesty's arms in this part of the world, accept these few lines from one who thinks himself extremely happy in having been appointed to serve in the expedition against fort Frontenac.

I flatter myself that a short account of this place, and its great importance, will not be disagreeable from a person who is so thoroughly acquainted with the subject he speaks upon, and has had many opportuni-

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ties to inform himself particularly about every thing that relates to this place.

I never designed that this letter should in the least resemble a panegyrick on your administration, I shall leave that to more able pens; therefore will confine myself at present to my subject, and endeavour to acquit myself with truth and impartiality in the following relation.

Frontenac, called by the natives Cadaraqui, is a fort advantageously situated for a trade with the Iroquese, or five nations; for their villages lie in the neighbourhood of the lake which bears the same name, and on which it is built, and by whose means they may transport their furs in canoes, with more ease than they can carry them over land to New-York. It was built to suppress the ravages of these Indians, into the heart of whose country they can
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thence make excursions in twenty-four hours ; but they demolished it in 1688, before which time it was a square consisting of large curtains, flanked with four little bastions ; these flanks had but two battlements, and the walls so low that one might easily climb over them without a ladder ; and all of it but indifferently fenced with mud banks and pallisades. It stands near the junction of lake Ontario with the great river St. Lawrence. It was here that the famous M. de la Sale built two barks, both which lie at this day sunk near the castle. It is about 150 miles S. W. from Montreal ; and 100 leagues above Quebec. The winter about this place is much shorter than at Quebec, and the soil so well cultivated, as to yield all sorts of European and Indian corn, and other fruits.

When his majesty's forces under

der colonel Bradstreet took this important place, it was surrounded with walls, bastions, and other fortifications of square stone, which are found in great plenty, and ready cut and polished by the beating of the waves of the lake above-mentioned, on the north side of which it is built, on a peninsula, and near which is a good haven for all sorts of vessels to ride in safety. It mounted sixty pieces of cannon; and is situated in lat. $44^{\circ} 20'$.

Some of the colonies that came hither, brought with them several sorts of horned cattle, fowl, and other useful creatures; so that there seldom or never was a want of any thing in it. When we took it there were vast magazines of all sorts of provision and ammunition in it; which it will be very difficult for the French to re-establish.

The only natural misfortune attending

tending this place is, that the advantageous communication between this lake, Montreal and Quebec, is somewhat difficult and dangerous, because the river of the Iroquois is full of rocks, cataracts, and may be easily obstructed by the ambushes of that wild people, who lie on each side.

This fort was one of the principal marts the French had in North-America, for a trade with the Indians; which took off a great quantity of coarse woolen goods, such as strouds and duffils, and with these, guns, hatchets, knives, hoes, kettles, powder and shot; besides shirts and cloaths ready made, iron and brass work, and trinkets of all sorts, with several other articles; in exchange for all sorts of furs. The Indians come to this mart from all parts of North America, even from the distance of a thousand miles. The trade

trade now is wholly confined to fort Frontenac and Montreal; for tho' many, if not most of the Indians, actually pass by our settlement of Albany in New York, where they may have the goods they want cheaper considerably than at either Montreal or Frontenac; yet they travel on many miles further to buy the same commodities at second hand, and enhanced by the expence of so long a land carriage at the French marts. For the French find it cheaper to buy our goods from the New York merchants, than to have them from their own, after so bad and so tedious a passage as it is from the mouth of the river St. Lawrence to Frontenac; so much do the French exceed us in industry, oeconomy, and the arts of conciliating the affections of mankind; things that even ballance all the disadvantages they naturally labour under in
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this country. It may not be improper here, Sir, to lay before you one instance of which I myself was a witness.

Six Indians came from the banks of the Ohio, with a very valuable cargo of furs; they brought them some part of the way in canoes, and at some places on their shoulders, (to avoid being seen by the French from their forts on that river) with an incredible deal of patience and industry, to our town of Albany in New York; they there met with several Englishmen, who cheapened their goods, and pretended to agree with them for the sale of them; in the mean time they found means to intoxicate these poor Indians with spirituous liquors; and in the middle of their drunken fit, made their bargain, infinitely to the advantage of themselves, as may be supposed; but this was not all.

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There came with these six Indians, three women, wives to three of the Indians; who, while their husbands were intoxicated with brandy, were deluded away by three Englishmen, and debauched by them. Heaven seldom suffers so brutal a piece of villany to go unpunished; the Indian men, in their return home, discovering how grossly they had been abused, had their wives all three burnt to death, as soon as they got home (which is the punishment their laws inflict on those who are guilty of adultery). These Indians never forgive an injury, and they vowed revenge on the authors of their disgrace; they assembled and armed fourscore or an hundred of their neighbours, and marched, day and night, several hundred miles, till they arrived on the confines of New York, where they burnt and destroyed every settlement that came
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in their way; scalping all the miserable, the innocent inhabitants. It is said they happened on but one of their particular enemies; him they carried away prisoner, to endure torments, at the very name of which human nature shudders; it must be allowed that he deserved punishment as well as those who escaped from the just vengeance of these irritated Indians. From this time their nation has remained fast friends to our enemies the French.

How contrary to this behaviour are the maxims of the vigilant French: at their fair at Montreal, the governor assists, to preserve order at the great concourse of nations which then meet to traffick; the use of spirituous liquors is absolutely forbid, under the severest penalties, and all possible harmony is observed. But I will dwell no longer on a subject, which cannot be otherwise than

very disagreeable to a man who does all that is possible to maintain a proper regard to the interests of the British nation in every part of the world.

Before I proceed any further in this epistle, it will be proper to give you some accounts of the lake I have so often mentioned, and on which fort Frontenac is built.

The lake Ontario is near 280 leagues in circumference; its figure is oval, and its depth runs between twenty and twenty-five fathom. On the north side is several little gulphs. There is a communication between this lake and that of the Hurons, by the river Tanaouate; from whence you have a land-carriage of six or eight leagues to the river Toronto, which falls into it. The French have two forts of consequence on this lake. Frontenac, which commands the river St. Lawrence, where

where the lake communicates with it. And Niagara, which commands the communication between lake Ontario and Erie; the Iroqueuse blocked up, and starved the garrison of this fort, some time ago; but the French wheedled the Indians by their priests, to let them erect the fort again, under the notion of store-houses.

On the south-east side of this lake stood our fort of Oswego, an infant settlement, made by the province of New York, with the noble view of gaining to the crown of Great-Britain the command of the five lakes, and the dependence of the Indians in the neighbourhood; and to its subjects the benefit of trade carried on by the Indians, both upon the lakes and the rivers which flow into them. On the point formed by the entrance of the river, stood the fort, or trading castle. It was a

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strong house, encompassed with a stone wall near twenty feet high, and one hundred and twenty paces around, built of large square stones, very curious both for their softness and durability.

I think there can be little doubt made, but that a minister of your genius and abilities has been made acquainted with the immense importance of this place. I really was amazed (when I took a view of the spot of ground on which this fort stood) at the negligence in our commanders in this part of the world, in not fortifying this place in the best manner possible; and still more so, that after the French had taken and demolished it, we never re-established it. There is a report amongst our troops at this time, that our commander, colonel Bradstreet, will soon set about rebuilding it, and making it superior to any attempts
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the French can possibly make against it, especially after so successful a blow as we have lately struck.

It will be absolutely necessary to build a few frigates, to cruise continually on the lake, which will hinder any communication, between the northern and southern settlements on this lake; and with good management, I make no doubt, but we might make all the trade, which now is confined to Montreal, centre at Oswego. If one considers the country, we shall not wonder at this, since most of the Indians, who trade to Montreal, are obliged to carry their furs in canoes over this lake; which would be impossible for them to do, if we had any frigates to cruise on it. It would be needless for me to inform you of the vast benefit it would be to our colonies, to have the friendship of those Indians, who now are fast friends to

our

our dangerous enemies the French. These Indians will always be friends to those who use them best, and will let them have the necessaries they want cheapest; it is very evident, from what I have said above, that it is in our power to supply them with every thing they want much cheaper than the French can possibly do; and if we ever but establish the fort at Oswego, and use the Indians with half the policy which our enemies do, I don't see why we should not engross the whole fur trade of the five lakes; if this once comes to be the case, the French settlement of Canada would not pay the charges of keeping.

One who understands the true interest of the British nation so well as you do, Sir, must be entirely satisfied with the importance of every inch of land in North America; if we suffer the French to encroach a furlong,

furlong, it is ten to one but in a twelvemonth's time, they usurp fourscore or a hundred miles. This is verified by their behaviour at Crown Point. The natural and just boundaries of our colonies is the river St. Lawrence; now some time ago, the French built several forts, and made some inconsiderable settlements, on our side the river, and they perceiving that we took no notice of them, in a few years, took possession, neither with your leave, nor by your leave, of at least a hundred miles of territory, which was our undoubted right, by fortifying themselves at Crown Point; and which now we feel a terrible thorn, which pricks our very vitals in these parts. This nest of French is now become so considerable, as to have braved the force of all our colonies; there is an absolute necessity for us to make ourselves masters of it; let

the expence be what it will. We are apt to take no notice of their encroachments, till they become considerable enough to make us feel the weight of that scourge which our own negligent imprudence put into the hands of our enemy.

To me it seems very surprizing that the French have been able to command such success in this country as they generally do. The whole number of them in Canada don't exceed fourscore thousand souls; these might be no just cause of dread to our colonies if they managed the strength they have, and which is certainly much superior, with skill and effect. The French from their's, though inferior, have seven or eight thousand militia, hardy and well disciplined, always in readiness to co-operate with their regular troops; and there is nothing which may hinder or retard their operations,

tions from within themselves. It is therefore not more the French intrigues, and their intermarriage with the Indians, which fix that people in the French interest, than the succours which they are always sure to have from such a force, ever in readiness to protect them, whilst they remain their friends, or to punish them whenever they dare to appear as enemies. With us the case is quite otherwise. This savage people commence hostilities against us without any previous notice; and often, without any provocation, they commit the most horrid ravages for a long time with impunity. But when at last their barbarities have roused the sleeping strength of our people, at the same time too that they have considerably lessened it, they are not ashamed to beg a peace; they know we always grant it readily; they promise it shall endure

as long as the sun and moon ; and then all is quiet, till the French intrigues, co-operating with our indolence, give them once more an opportunity of ravaging our colonies, and of once more renewing a peace, to be broken like all the former.

One of the principal reasons why the French are so much more successful in what concerns their Indian affairs, than us, is, their having such a multitude of forts at all the passes in the country, which they find very effectual in bridling the Indians, and in their traffick. It behoves us to build, likewise, forts wherever any particular situation seems to want such a defence ; from these forts, we might have parties of friendly Indians continually sallying forth, and scouring all the enemies country ; particularly on the lakes Erie and Ontario, and at the junction of all the considerable rivers in the country.

try. But above all, never to let the French usurp that noble country watered by the Ohio. This river runs through great part of our colonies of Pensylvania and Virginia, and waters a country near 500 miles square, which is reckoned one of the finest of North America; and might justly be said to be one of the most fertile and beautiful countries in the world, consisting chiefly of spacious plains, covered with trees of various kinds, such as large walnut and hickery, mixed frequently with poplars, cherry-trees, sugar-trees, and the like; so that whether we regard the fineness of its stream, or the lands through which it flows; it well deserves the name of Ohio, or Hohio, which signifies the fair river.

From its source, near the habitations of the six nations, to its conflux with the Mississippi, it has several

veral large rivers falling into it, that spread over a prodigious extent of country belonging to our colonies. The Ohio is also remarkable for its gentle current, contrary to most of the inland rivers of North America, which are very rapid, and have a great many cataracts, or falls in them: but in the Ohio, we know but of one fall, being navigable both up and down. The Ohio is very crooked, as is common with rivers running through a level country as this does: but the current is by these windings rendered much gentler, and consequently the river more easy to navigate. This is the case of the Ohio; for it is navigable from the Mississippi, almost to the river Senecaas, which falls into the lake Ontario at Oswego.

The country on the south side of the Ohio, at some distance, is very mountainous, and difficult to pass
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for some hundred miles. The Apalachean mountains there extend west, within one or two hundred miles of the Mississippi. But on the north side of the Ohio, between that and lake Erie, the country is level and very fertile ; being also watered with numbers of rivers that run through it, from the banks of lake Erie to the Ohio.

We need not therefore wonder that the French, or any others, should be desirous of maintaining themselves in this country, as they may do it at little or no expence ; especially as they have such numbers of the natives at their command. Here they will soon encrease and multiply, to the constant disturbance of all our colonies, as long as they are suffered to possess the country south of lake Erie.

You, Sir, most certainly know the great importance of the country watered

watered by the Ohio ; 'tis what we are now in a war, to maintain ; and surely, when once we so plainly perceive the consequence of it, it will be an inexcusable piece of negligence, not to exert ourselves in the most resolute manner to recover. Even at this day we are in great danger of having it wrested from us ; and its being well secured is of so much importance to all our colonies in general, that we ought to well fortify it, whenever it is in our power, by building forts in convenient places along the river, especially at each extremity ; that is, one at the mouth of the Ohio, on the Mississippi, and another at Niagara, near the lake Ontario. This last will prevent the communication between Louisiana and Canada, by that lake and the Erie, and oblige the French to abandon their forts on the south-east side of this last lake, by rendering them

them useless, as well as save us the expence of erecting a fort at Irondequai on the lake Ontario, about sixty miles to the east of Niagara streight, a place which they have long had their eyes upon for erecting a fort; and which we must be under the necessity of fortifying in case the French remain at Niagara, in order to prevent their taking possession of it.

The fort at the mouth of the Ohio ought to be strongly built and garrisoned, and a considerable settlement made about it; after this settlements might be gradually carried on between the Mississippi, and the Alligany mountains, backwards and forwards at the same time. Nor can too much encouragement be given to settle this country; especially on the side of the Mississippi, as soon as possible, by allowing the people to settle how and where they

they pleased, without making large grants to any company, which has hitherto proved a great obstacle to settling, and on many accounts proved very detrimental to the colonies.

With regard to our more northern colonies, the first thing that demands our attention, is the province of New York ; this will in a great measure be affected by the forts to be built at Niagara and Oswego ; together with the armed vessels, which should by all means be built on the lake Ontario. It should be observed, that the fort of Oswego was built with the consent of the Indians, by governor Barnet, in 1727, and stood even unmolested till the late war ; and though the garrison usually consisted of only twenty-three men, yet while it lasted it was of more service to us than all the rest. This you will easily perceive to be a demon-

demonstrative proof of the great importance and advantage of such forts; on the number of which, small garrisons, properly placed, the interest and support of the French almost entirely depend.

The more effectually to secure New York, it is absolutely necessary either to make ourselves master of the French fort at Crown-Point, or to build another in sight of it; for, by means of that post, the French are enabled to intercept, or at least disturb, the trade from Albany up both the branches of Hudson's river to the six nations, by sending a force on that side; and, could they destroy the commerce of those Indians with the province of New York, they would oblige them to rely wholly on Canada. This they threatened to do in the year 1732; and have advanced pretty fast to put their threats in execution. You

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must be sensible of what bad consequence it will be of to suffer them any longer to restrain our trade with the Indians.

During the late French war, from 1744 to 1748, Crown-Point was the rendezvous of the French and their Indians, from whence they attacked New York and the north-west corner of Massachusset's Bay. From this place, in 1745, they made a descent on a settlement on Hudson's river, about thirty miles above Albany, called Sartagova, which they destroyed; and during that, and the following year, they destroyed most of the plantations on the north-east branch of that river, killing and taking prisoners above 300 of our people.

Besides building this counter fort, Albany ought to be put in the best posture of defence, in order to secure it against any attempt on that side.

side. This quarter requires the strongest barriers, because the French have declared it to be the chief object of their views. It lies near Quebec, the centre of their strength in Canada, from whence they have a most convenient passage, all by water, excepting a small space of about twelve miles by land.

Besides what I have said, there is a necessity to take the French fort of Du Quesne. This is a post of the greatest consequence; and although our troops have been repulsed, still I make no doubt but another attempt will soon be made against it with a sufficient force: at least, this is the common opinion in our army. If fort Du Quesne and Niagara were in our hands, they would protect our colonies from both the French and Indians, if well secured by us: but on the other side, if they remain in the hands of the French, we shall

have an inland frontier of between two and three thousand miles in extent to defend ; constantly exposed to the incursions of a hostile and warlike enemy. The French have several forts on the Ohio, which is so important to us ; but the chief of them is fort Du Quesne, by which, with Niagara and Frontenac, they united their colonies and straggling settlements together ; but by our taking of Frontenac, we have in part broke this so formidable chain. Du Quesne is about mid-way between Canada and Louisiana, and serves as a middle station between those two French colonies, for which it is more convenient than any other place in all North America. It stands at the same time in a fine fertile country of vast extent, and in a healthy climate. The French have many Indians about fort Du Quesne, to support them and other settlements.

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This fort is convenient not only to Canada and Louisiana, but also to all the settlements the French have among the Indians up and down the whole continent of North America. By means of this fort they bridle all the Indians round about. We may soon expect to see fort Du Quesne become as considerable and respectable a place, as it is a convenient and important one, and to be made another Louisbourg, or Quebec, if it remains in the hands of the French. The situation of the French forts shew (especially this of Du Quesne) the admirable policy and industry of that nation. From fort Du Quesne, they can at any time make incursions into the very heart of our colonies.

No doubt but you, Sir, must certainly know that there is an absolute necessity either to drive the French out of their unjust acquisitions, by force

force of arms, as they have entered, or to build forts as they have done. The first course is to be sure the most eligible; and to pursue this scheme, we cannot do better than follow their own rules, that is, to take their capital, Quebec, and finish the work at once, as they have threatened to take possession of our province of New York. Preparatory to which, the proper way would be to sweep all the country south of the river St. Lawrence clear of the French, and demolish their settlements: this is the shortest, as well as the most effectual manner, and what would be found less expensive to the nation. Each place affords almost the same conveniency of being attacked. We can as easily conduct ships to Quebec as the French can to New York; and an English army must take the very same route through the country from

New York to Quebec, which the French must take from Quebec to New York. The English in America have lost many opportunities of making themselves masters of Canada, and driving the French from thence, when they were not the sixth part so strong as they are at present. In 1688, when their whole force was scarce 2000 men, the five nations, to be revenged on the marquis of Nouville, who had seized the Seneka's country the year before, surprised the island, which they entered on the south side, burnt all the plantations, and massacred above 1000 French. The five nations lost only three men in this expedition, who getting drunk were left behind. In October following, they invaded Montreal a second time; and having destroyed the plantations on the lower side of the island, carried away many prisoners. If only New
York

York had performed her engagements at that time with the five nations, or the latter understood the method of attacking forts, the year 1688 would have been as memorable in America for the destruction of Canada as it is in Great Britain for the banishment of popery and arbitrary power.

The French have a chain of forts from which they can annoy us in all quarters, while they are secure themselves. The principal of these are Crown Point, Niagara, and fort Du Quesne; but especially the two latter. Before we took Frontenac, that was one of the most considerable. The destroying Crown Point will prevent the present insults of the French; but the destruction of Du Quesne and Niagara will sap the very foundations of their usurped power, and give us peace upon our own terms. You may have observed
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that the colonies depending immediately on the crown, such as Virginia and New York, have been much less harrassed by the Indians, and much better prepared to defend their respective countries than the charter-governments of New England. This makes one believe that the most effectual method to drive the French entirely out of North America, would be to unite all the northern colonies under one governor; as Nova Scotia, New England, New York, and Pensylvania; and the southern ones, under another.

If this was done, I think we might soon expect to see the French quite driven out of the American continent; for they would never be able to resist the whole strength of our plantations, if it was properly united against them. There are some objections to this scheme, and

so there must be to every one that can be offered ; and that which has the least inconveniencies attending it, ought to be embraced. I am of opinion with several other gentlemen, who knows this country perfectly well, that in time of war, the best thing we could do, would be to attack Quebec. This city is not strong ; and if a fleet and a considerable body of land forces were sent up the river St. Lawrence, at a proper season of the year, with skilful pilots, I make no doubt, (setting aside any unlikely and unforeseen accidents) but they would give a good account of this city. If they could once land their men in safety, their business would be done ; as to the city, the fortifications are but very indifferent. The ill success that attended our expeditions, whenever we sailed up the river St. Lawrence, is no argument against attempting

tempting the siege of Quebec again; because it was always owing to the want of pilots who understood that navigation; but this can no longer be a reason against the attempt, since father Charlevoix's history of New France has been published.

Were we once able to master Quebec, and fortify ourselves strongly in that city for the present time, all Canada would fall of course; 'till we found that this was the case, it would be adviseable to remain at Quebec, but fortified in the strongest manner; because, while we commanded the navigation of St. Lawrence, by means of our having that city in our power, the inland French would be obliged to surrender; as they could not then be able to be supplied with any thing from Old France.

You, Sir, I am sure, must know the value of our colonies too well,

not to have considered which would be the most likely method to make them entirely safe from any future encroachments of the French. No doubt, many schemes have been offered to you upon that head ; and, indeed, our possessions here have lately been so very precarious, that it is high time to take their safety under consideration.

From what I have said above, it appears that the French, by means of their settlements in Canada and Louisiana, have entirely surrounded our Colonies upon the continent of North America ; and thereby cut us off from all correspondence with the natives of that vast continent, except the few that inhabit those tracts of land, which in fact, belong to our own colonies. And from this it appears, that they have now opened a communication, mostly by water carriage, from the mouth
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of the river St. Lawrence to the mouth of the river Mississippi ; and have in a manner taken possession of those great lakes in North America, which are the largest in the known world. I leave you to judge what the consequence of such an encroachment would be.

But not to detain you with such a representation, which, how true soever it is, still must be disagreeable to you, I make no doubt but you will continue to guide the helm of state with such prudence; as not to overlook our colonies, which are so essential to our independency as a free nation. Should the French ever be able to put their ambitious schemes in execution ; and that enterprising and restless nation become as powerful in America, as they are already in Europe : I say, from so fatal and so unhappy a period, might

might we date the first days of our slavery. For no man can possibly think, that if the French were once masters in America, but that they would soon be so in Britain; one is the natural consequence, which certainly will follow soon after the other.

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